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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: JORDAN: INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS WEIGH IN ON  
PARLIAMENT-PRESS DISPUTE

REF: A. AMMAN 1412  
[1](#)B. AMMAN 1393

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) In courtesy calls to three chief editors, Acting Information Officer asked whether freedom of expression had increased or decreased over the past year in Jordan. All three editors separately acknowledged that journalists routinely practice self-censorship on sensitive topics, including the Royal family, the military, and the General Intelligence Directorate (GID). "We all know who the deities are," said Taher Al-Odwan, Chief Editor of the independent Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm.

[1](#)2. (C) At the same time, the three editors noted the almost complete cessation of interference by GID authorities since the replacement of former chief Mohammed Al-Dahabi in December 2008. The new chief, Mohammed Al-Rakkad, is known as a technocrat who does not interfere in press affairs, said Moussa Al-Barhoumeh, editor of Al-Ghad, the No. 1 independent Arabic language daily in Jordan.

[1](#)3. (C) That said, GID did interfere in the recent dispute between the Parliament and the media in the wake of the lower house's rejection of a bill that would have lifted a 5 percent tax on media advertising, according to the editors (reftels). Several newspaper editors got a call from GID officials in late June, requesting that they pull an online poll where readers were asked: "Do you support the continuation of the current Lower House?" Ninety-five percent of the nearly 200,000 readers responded "no," which was featured prominently in media reporting. In response to the GID request, the editors pulled the poll, although they did not specify whether they had given an ultimatum.

[1](#)4. (C) The editors of Al-Ghad and Al-Arab Al-Yawm cited a variety of legal mechanisms that can be used to punish journalists who transgress unclear boundaries, including detention under the penal code and fines under the Press and Publications Law. The editor of the government-owned Al-Rai daily, Abdel Wahab Zugheilat, asserted that journalists needed to be educated further on their ethical responsibilities. Zugheilat, who heads the Jordan Press Association, of which membership is mandatory for practicing journalists, said that he planned to develop such training. He also spoke supportively of a new proposal under consideration by an unspecified group of government officials to create a specialized court to handle media-related cases.

[1](#)5. (C) Comment: Over the past two years, there has been some forward movement to expand the possibility for freedom of expression, including several months of virtually no GID interference with the press, the King's public statement in November 2008 declaring that detention of journalists should be "prohibited," and changes in 2007 to the Press and Publications Law that eliminated jail time for journalists. That said, the overall bureaucracy in Jordan still inclines toward constraining the media, through measures including the

possibility of detention for journalists under the penal code, fines, taxes on media advertisements, mandatory membership in the JPA, the most recent GID interference on the media-parliament dispute, and proposals such as the one mentioned by Zugheilat to create a specialized court for media-related cases.

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